

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Inviting

It's awful when you've invited guests and they don't turn up: a situation I suppose most of us have met. What d'you do with the food? It's ticklish. Ring someone else up and say, *Would you like to come and eat this dinner?* But they can hardly avoid realising that they are second-best options. (In the clergy world it never does to be pleased at your appointment to some post, until you've discovered how many priests have turned it down before you were offered it.)

The Uninvitable

You might recognise the state of being uninvitable in yourself. To some extent, I think, we all *withhold* ourselves from an open contact with others. We think poorly of ourselves: we don't want to risk rejection; we think people would be better off without us; or we err on the side of disinterest, feeling that we are too busy to make time, or that we have better things to do. These are the feelings of the invited in the parable, and we must assume that Jesus encountered such feelings in the people he met in Palestine. *They were not interested*, says Matthew: unlike the same people in Luke's similar story, they don't even offer excuses or apologies, but go off about their business. Some of them may, indeed, be indifferent; but others turn violent, which draws the link between refusing the invitation, and the crucifying of Jesus. It is this leap from indifference to murderous hostility that I find shocking in the story.

Sin Is Not Trivial

Cardinal Newman once spoke in horrendous terms about the significance of sin. He thought we are always ready to miss the dimension of rebellion that lurks behind what we choose to call our little failings, our peccadilloes. He thought fire, flood, earthquake, and the perishing of nations under volcanic tides were all preferable to the commission of one "venial" sin. I found this reflection deeply shocking when I first came upon it, and took a long time to get round to it. He was trying to help me to deplore *any* sin, and if I had believed the teaching that *all my actions and choices are important*, in that they are part of the *great* choice I'm here to make for or against God, I'd have been quicker to understand.

The Religion of Remembrance

The invitation-card to Christ's Kingdom sits on our mantelpiece as it did on the Jews'. Maybe we will find ourselves caught up into this same drama. Each of us has a purpose in the world, known to God, and probably unknown to us. One day he will knock on our door, and we shall be challenged to rise at his summons, as Peter was, and Andrew, and James and John, and all the long procession of saints and heroes of the Christian life. It seems that we should practice leaping to our feet, reaching for the Wedding Garment, and coming to the feast. What will make that possible for us? Surely we have to be moved by love. Love is what mobilises the forces of our personality, uniting them and putting them into order. You may have seen the moment in *The Simpsons* where Bart and Lisa both call the baby Maggie to "come to the one you love the best". After some dummy-sucking, Maggie makes her way firmly to the television and falls asleep with her head on the screen. You can perhaps draw the conclusion that what fills our eyes and minds most regularly is what we shall finally love.

Final Judgment

The choice demanded of the invited guests was momentous. The option they made was disastrous. They showed too clearly where their true hearts were set: in their own concerns. This was not just an indifferent selfishness, but a killing one; the gift of our heart does engage our whole personality, with all its awesome powers. Maybe we live half-asleep, maybe we don't see the consequences of our poor prayer, our half-hearted faith. We must wake, and prepare for the summons to the banquet. When it comes, it must take precedence over everything else. It will not demand so much of us, if only we can think clearly; the Kingdom will not remain something to choose for ever. A day will come when there is the Kingdom, and nothing else. Those who have not chosen the Kingdom will be the weakest link, and will go away with nothing.
Fr Philip